



## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

Essential tremor is one type of movement disorder. Movement disorders affect the ability to produce and control movement. Parkinson's disease is a different type of movement disorder. Essential tremor is a common problem in people aged 60 and older. Men and women are affected equally.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- The main symptom is tremor, which is a trembling or an up-and-down movement of the hands. The tremor may be noticed when doing simple tasks such as holding a glass of water. The tremor may occur in the arms, head, and voice. Rarely, it affects the trunk and legs.
- Walking in an unsteady manner.
- The symptoms start on a gradual basis, usually in mid-to-late life. In a few cases, symptoms begin in childhood, go away for many years, and then start up again.
- Being tired, feeling anxious, or being in hot climates can make the symptoms worse.
- Symptoms usually disappear when you sleep or rest.

### CAUSES

- In about half of the cases, the cause is genetic. The genes were passed on by your parents. Familial tremor is the term used when it affects more than one person in a family.
- In the other half of the cases, the cause is unknown.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Family history of essential tremor.
- Age. Most often, the disorder occurs in older people.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

None known.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- In many people, the disorder may not get worse and the tremor may be mild throughout life.
- Others may have symptoms that get worse as they get older. There are treatments that can help relieve the symptoms.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- The tremor makes it difficult to do everyday tasks in the home, perform hobbies, or other activities you may enjoy.
- Tremor may cause difficulty in performing your job.
- Feeling embarrassed about the tremor may lead to an avoidance of social activities.



## DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam, and ask questions about your symptoms and your activities. You may be asked to write, drink from a glass, or hold a piece of paper so that the tremor can be observed. There are a variety of medical problems that can involve similar symptoms. Medical tests on blood and urine are usually done to rule out other disorders.
- Treatment may not be needed if the symptoms are mild and are not causing other problems.
- Treatment steps may include special exercises using weights for your hands and arms. These will be taught to you by a physical therapist. You can then continue doing them at home.
- Counseling may help if you are having emotional problems in coping with the changes in your life brought on by the symptoms.
- Surgery is rare, but may help if symptoms are severe.
- Joining a support group may help some people. Ask your health care provider about groups in your area.
- To learn more: We Move, 204 West 84th St., New York, NY, 10024; (800) 437-MOV2; website: [www.wemove.org](http://www.wemove.org).

### MEDICATIONS

There are several different classes of drugs that are used to treat tremors. Your health care provider will discuss the options with you and decide if they are appropriate.

### ACTIVITY

Try to maintain an active lifestyle. Exercise each day.

### DIET

- Avoid caffeine in coffee, tea, and soft drinks. It may make the symptoms worse.
- Avoid alcohol, or use it on a limited basis. It may help the tremors short term, but it is not wise to use it as a form of treatment.



## NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of essential tremor.
- Symptoms get worse despite treatment.

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Special notes:

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More notes on the back of this page